

Georgia Occupational Regulation Review Council

Meeting Minutes: September 8, 2022

- I. Call to Order
Chair, Meaghan Carver, called the meeting to order and welcomed the members of the Council to the first meeting regarding HB 1599 at 1 PM.
- II. Introduction of Members, GORRC Process and Schedule
Meaghan Carver presented an overview of the GORRC process. Meaghan Carver, Megan Andrews, Dr. Georgia Steele, Kate Iannuzzi, Sen. Harbison introduced themselves as members of the council. The chair introduced the remaining absent members - Bo Warren, Kelly Dudley, Sam Teasley, and Rep. Ehrhart.
- III. Overview of House Bill 1599
The chair introduced HB 1599 LC 33 9142 for discussion.
- IV. Scheduled Discussion
 - a. Chairman Alan Powell, House Regulated Industries Committee, sponsor of HB 1599

Chairman Powell stated that Marriage and Family Therapists have been in effect in Georgia for almost 40 years but there have been no updates to the criteria for licensing. This bill will put them in sync with the national accreditation by updating education requirements and raising clinical hours of training. Requirements are antiquated and puts it in line with other states. He reiterated given that this day in time, licensed marriage and family therapists are extremely important.
 - b. Dr. Kara McDaniel, PhD, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), President of Georgia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (GAMFT) - Applicant Group

Dr. McDaniel is involved in private practice, is an approved supervisor, and adjunct faculty. Dr. McDaniel gave an overview of GAMFT and MFTs. Their main objective is to advocate for the profession and therapists as well as helping the community. MFTs are licensed in all states and licensed in Georgia since 1984. MFTs have specialized training in working with individuals, couples, and families across the lifespan from a young age to the aging population. With specialized training and education, MFTs handle all types of backgrounds and workplace settings including healthcare, inpatient facilities, CSBs, and academia. The Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) made accreditation changes, and this bill was created to address these changes. Work has occurred over the past year to look at the new standards, licensing requirements, and academic requirements to ensure they are aligned. If passed, HB 1599 will align Georgia with COAMFTE requirements and academic standards. Licensing requirements are also updated in the bill. It will also adjust practice hour requirements to align Georgia with other states to allow for ease of attracting therapists to Georgia. Dr. McDaniel gave an overview of documents submitted to the council: survey responses, state comparison chart, Southeast state license requirements, COAMFTE standards effective January 2022, Dr. Steve Livingston's

CV, and letters of support. Dr. McDaniel has received confirmation that the Licensed Professional Counselors board has voted to support the bill and gave a list of witnesses that plan on speaking on the bill.

- c. Meaghan Carver presenting OPB Staff Research

In the interest of time, staff research was moved to the next meeting to cover anything not mentioned by speakers in the public comment section.

V. Public Comment

- a. Roger Smith, JD, General Counsel for the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

Roger Smith introduced himself and Patricia Barton to give an overview of AMFT and their relationship to COAMFTE and GAMFT. COAMFTE is the only accreditation organization for MFTs. There are 123 MFT educational programs accredited, of which 4 are in Georgia. COAMFTE has been in practice since 1978. MFTs are licensed in all 50 states with approximately 73k licensed MFTs in the US. COAMFTE supports HB 1599 to align with current standards. The current standards make it difficult for qualified applicants to obtain a license in Georgia since they vary from other states. These barriers cause some applicants not to move forward with licensing in Georgia. HB 1599 would align with current COAMFTE 12.5 standards and remove barriers while protecting the public from harm.

- b. Dr. Steve Livingston, LMFT, PhD, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, Retired Associate Professor and Director of Behavioral Services, Mercer University School of Medicine, Former Chair of the Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers and Marriage and Family Therapists 2015-2019, Vice Chair 2012-2014, and member 2011 -2021. CV submitted.

Dr. Livingston summarized his qualifications and previous board positions. He clarified the MFT code section gives privilege for diagnosing and treating mental illness as well as seeing individuals, couples, and families. MFTs serve the whole range of clients in Georgia. He reviewed the process GAMFT went through to determine the changes to align with national standards. The House Rural Development Council mentioned MFTs in their report and the difference in standards to other states. There are efforts to align these standards across states in service of an interstate compact that is in progress. The bill only amends section 13 and will not change any other disciplines. GMFT went through statutes of all 50 states and compiled licensing requirements. The bill lowers direct client contact hours from 500 hours to 300 hours. This is due to the COAMFTE standard and to be in line with other states. Previous COAMFTE standards defined the 500 hours to include time spent documenting. The 300-hour requirement now reflects direct client contact hours. By lowering the hour requirement, it should not lower the hours spent on client contact or change standard of care. Dr. Livingston reviewed the hour requirements comparisons among southeast states to show how Georgia's current and proposed practice hours compare. The bill also removed all direct reference to hours needed and instead references COAMFTE standards for a cleaner code section and eliminates listed coursework that is no longer required or taught.

The chair asked how often the accreditation standards are updated in which Dr. Livingston responded every 5 years or so. References to the commission standards set forth on a particular date in the bill are due to the ban on delegation of authority. Any subsequent changes to standards will need to be codified in a new bill to allow for review of the new standards by the General Assembly.

Sen. Harbison asked for the attendees to briefly restate that there is no drop in the standard of care and that we are simply aligning to other states and new standards. Dr. Livingston stated that there is no evidence-based research that states what number of hours is the correct number of hours for licensing. Learning outcomes are more meaningful as well as a focus on the services provided. Sen. Harbison observed that this will also accommodate military and military spouses.

The chair asked if aligning the standards to other states would make the process of joining a potential interstate compact easier or require less changes at the time of joining the compact. Dr. Livingston and Roger Smith said that the closer they are aligned, the easier it will be. The current Georgia licensing board frequently rejects qualified applicants that do not meet Georgia's requirements without additional training. These changes will help address any supply issues in the state.

Dr. Jennifer Gonyea added that regarding clinical training and hours required, professors are required to evaluate the core competencies and skills each semester (every 3-4 months). If the student is not advancing in the core competencies regardless of the number of hours trained, the student does not progress further in the program.

- c. Dr. Andrea Meyer-Stinson, PhD, LMFT, Assistant Program Director of the Master of Family Therapy Program at Mercer University School of Medicine in Macon, and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics in the medical school.

Dr. Meyer Stinson said she is on the accreditation review committee for COAMFTE which allows her to witness challenges other programs face in other states regarding misalignment of standards. Masters' programs are the primary trainers and are the terminal degree for MFTs. These programs are required to meet COAMFTE and state standards, and the shifting of standards over the past 5 years regarding for educational needs, course work, and practicum hours has made it difficult. Educators are excited for this change to shift coursework to align with 2022, for example adding courses teaching telehealth. All COAMFTE accredited programs are required to publish annual graduate achievement data including licensure rates. Aligning requirements would make this data easier to demonstrate achievement of licensure. Current Georgia standards include courses that are no longer taught or required by other states. Contemporary issues such as multicultural families and telehealth needs are not met with current Georgia standards. The new standards place a greater importance on outcome-based education and quality rather than number of hours.

- d. Dr. Jennifer Gonyea, PhD, LMFT, Associate Clinical Professor at the University of Georgia, former Interim Program Director of the MFT Doctoral Program at UGA

Dr. Gonyea spoke on the retention of highly trained clinicians in Georgia due to higher licensing requirements. Students who come to Georgia for a doctorate come for the purposes of clinical research and advance training. We want those people to stay to be educators and practicing in our community to provide services. The changed in HB 1599 remove barriers to licensure, maintaining rigor, and provide incentive to alums to stay in Georgia. Doctoral students receive more advance training compared to Masters students, which allows for greater oversight in specific areas of study. The proposed changes make Georgia more attractive to supervisors and faculty.

e. Elizabeth J. Appley, Attorney and Lobbyist for GAMFT

Elizabeth thanked the council and with the lowering of practicum hours we will be consistent with Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia. Post Masters' hours would align us to North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia and put Georgia above many other states' requirements. Finally, this bill would address the Rural Development Council's recommendations.

f. Other interested parties
No other questions.

VI. Announcement of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on September 22, 2022 from 1-2 PM. Draft minutes will be sent to the council for approval at the next meeting.

VII. Adjourn